

Political Campaigning Newsletter

UF MA/PC Program

Summer 2017



Director's Corner

Boy, we certainly didn't see that coming. I'm talking about Donald Trump's (seemingly) unlikely win in the 2016 presidential election, of course. You may recall from last year's UF/PC newsletter the essay by Michael Martinez on forecasting models, most of which pointed to a narrow win for Hillary Clinton – the exception being “econometric” models (the most interesting to me because they predict outcomes months in advance based on economic and political conditions at the time), which reached exactly the opposite conclusion.

Bully for those econometric models, right? Wrong! Almost all forecasting models are designed to predict the winner of the two-party popular vote. And guess who that was. Yep, Hillary Clinton. Perhaps the most famous presidential forecaster is Allan Lichtman, a history professor at American University whose so-called “13 keys” model is said to have accurately pre- or post-dicted accurately every election since 1860. Lichtman received considerable media attention for having correctly anticipated Trump's win in 2016 – except that like the other models, his is focused on the popular vote. Having claimed credit for being accurate with Al Gore's popular vote win in 2000, I don't see how he can now take credit for Trump's electoral vote win in 2016. To put it simply, any model that forecast a Trump popular vote win was wrong. Period.

Which takes us to the various media polls in 2016, almost all of which (even as Election Day neared) anticipated a Clinton victory. While the pollsters have taken a lot of heat for this, especially in Trumpland, the fact is that they nailed it. At least in terms of the national vote, that is. Where the polls broke down was at the state level, where projections in places like Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin either (a) did not catch what appears to have been...

(Continued on page 3)



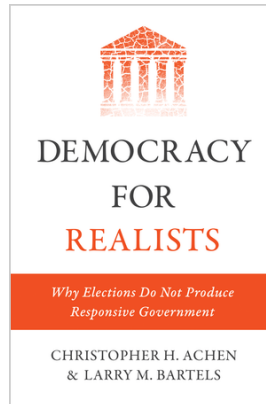
Dr. Stephen Craig

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Dr. Christopher Achen, Professor of Politics at Princeton University



Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels. 2016. *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*. Princeton University Press.

tend either to focus myopically on the very recent past or to hold politicians accountable for the weather and other things they cannot be expected to control.

If voters are neither rational gods of vengeance and reward nor clear-eyed Downsians, what are elections all about? Achen and Bartels see elections as the mobilization of social identities. For most voters, *social* identities (such as race, class, and religion) correspond to *partisan* identities, so not much thinking is required. Campaigns are about reminding voters who is on their side, and whose message sounds like what voters hear in their own networks of friends, neighbors, co-workers, and fellow churchgoers. Occasionally, candidates or parties can convince some groups to switch loyalties, as Catholics (and some Protestants) did in reaction to JFK's candidacy in 1960, and minorities and white southerners did in response to the Civil Rights Movement later that decade. But most of the time, most voters aren't really giving elected officials a mandate, as much as they are simply voting to affirm their own identities.

Unraveling the Folk Theory of Democracy

Dr. Michael Martinez

Many Americans, some elected officials, and a few political scientists subscribe to the "folk theory of democracy." According to this view of our political world, elections are a contest of ideas in which (a) candidates offer alternative policies and competing agendas, (b) campaigns communicate those choices via speeches, ads, and social networks, and (c) voters evaluate those options and make choices based on which proposals best fit their policy preferences. The ideal, normatively satisfying result of this process is election of the candidate whose policy views are closest to those of the average (median) voter. In a less demanding, retrospective version of the folk theory, voters are seen to have limited ability to see into the future and instead judge whether the incumbent's performance has been good enough job to deserve another term. Under either version, winners can claim some form of a mandate from voters.

Hogwash, or so says Chris Achen, the Roger Williams Straus Professor of Social Sciences and Professor of Politics at Princeton University. In his keynote address at our Department's Spring Banquet, Achen highlighted many of the themes in his book co-authored with Larry Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*. Achen and Bartels argue that the folk theory of democracy places unrealistic expectations on voters, many of whom lack coherent preferences or knowledge about the choices offered by candidates. A few politically astute voters (like graduates of the Political Campaigning program) may appear to have policy preferences that mostly coincide with their vote choices – but, more often than not, that reflects the motivation of those voters to align their preferences with their votes, rather than aligning their votes with their preferences. Retrospective voters, for their part,

Nevertheless, elections are important institutions. They determine who should hold office in a constitutional system, and the variations in motivations to vote over time produce enough turnover in office that elites should, in theory, develop a healthy tolerance for their opponents. In this era of partisan polarization, one wonders if that, too, is unrealistic.



Our 2017 PC award winners (from left): Alex Patton, who received the Walter "Skip" Campbell Leadership Award; and William England, winner of the Ralph E. Gonzalez Independent Spirit Award.

The Business of Consulting

By Alex Patton

I was first paid to work a campaign in 1992. After volunteering or consulting on hundreds of campaigns, I decided to return to graduate school in the fall of 2015. Setting aside the math, it would be fair to label me as a non-traditional student in the UF Political Campaigning Program.

As the old, battle-scarred operative in the class, I was asked countless times, “Why did you return to school?”

“I want to get better” was the standard reply — but there is more to it.

Political consultants participating in campaigns, for the most part, lack formal academic training. We are a motley crew comprised of professionals, hacks, and at times scoundrels — many of whom never consciously set out to be consultants at all. For the most part, the profession relies on apprenticeships and mentorships to pass down accumulated knowledge. I have been fortunate to have great mentors and to collaborate with competent practitioners; it is easy, however, to see that the pace of change is accelerating to the point of potentially rendering rules of thumb to be trite and banal.



Alex Patton

Was I, like some generals and consultants, reverting to a tendency to fight the last war? In between cycles this kept me up at night.

As graduation day drew closer, I was asked countless times, “After working in the field, what did you get out of the program?”

The answer: A lot.

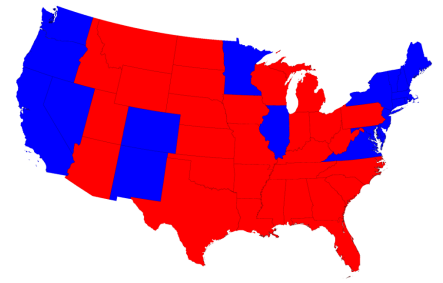
This program allowed me to verify or correct rules of thumb and largely self-taught statistical procedures that I had relied upon throughout my career.

In addition, I graduated with improved research and analytical skills that will provide invaluable assistance to answer new questions that arise in future cycles.

Most importantly, the principal benefit is the improving of my critical thinking skills. My professors shattered some of those old rules of thumbs — forcing me to dig deeper into the nuances, conditions, and possible alternative explanations of political phenomena.

Those professors were challenging, but fair, and the bottom line is that they and the program have made me a better consultant and thinker. I consider it an honor and privilege to have been taught by some of the finest minds in the country. Go Gators!

P.S. As an added bonus, the program gave me the opportunity to observe and study the millennial cohort up-close and personal. Boy, are they a “special” group.



Director's Corner, continued

...a late pro-Republican surge or else (b) employed sampling methods that missed quite a few Trump supporters in those states to begin with. At the national level, however, their numbers were pretty much on target.

I don't bring any of this up with the intent of trying to rehabilitate the reputation of either presidential forecasters or (national) pollsters. They did their job in 2016, and for the most part did it well. But what about myself and my colleagues in academia, very few of whom believed that Donald Trump had a snowball's chance of being elected president — a conclusion based in part on our almost universal conviction that, never mind what might happen in November, Trump's chances of being the Republican nominee were basically nil. (Jeb Bush, anyone?)

I attended a panel at the 2016 American Political Science Association meetings in Philadelphia that focused on the presidential nominating process and posed the question, Was 2016 an outlier or the new normal? For both nominations and the general election (and looking beyond just the presidency), that's something public opinion and voting behavior scholars will be studying for at least the next four years.



Alumni Spotlights

Lyndsay Jones Monstur
Associate Director of Major Gifts
Harvard Law School

Lyndsay came to the Campaigning program from her native England. She thought it would be a good idea to further her studies and gain some experience in the US to create the best grounding for a career in the UK. Her career has taken her in some unexpected directions.

After graduating, Lyndsay packed her car and drove to Washington, DC, where she decided to pursue fundraising because she recognized that campaigns always need money. She was soon brought on full time at a PAC fundraising firm.

Looking for new challenges, Lyndsay later accepted a political operations position with the Massachusetts Republican Party, and was eventually named the party's Finance Director. In that capacity, she was responsible for organizing fundraising events, the mail program, and call time for the party chair.

Deciding that another change was in order, Lyndsay chose to leave politics and transition into higher education. She began with annual giving (\$1,000 and up), but was soon promoted to the major gifts team (\$100,000-plus). She says that while education operates at a slower pace, she has been able to apply what she learned in politics to her current job. "I'm not afraid to make a ton of phone calls and try to work at 'campaign pace' as much as possible, which makes me stand out from my peers. Political campaigns also taught me the value of cultivating personal relationships and this has proved instrumental in major gifts fundraising. "

Lyndsay is happy to be out of politics right now, but warns that the political bug never leaves you.

Jenny Mesirov
Vice President, Government Affairs
Farm Credit Council

Jenny got her start interning in the District Office of Congressman Frank Pallone (D-NJ), where she was "inspired by how much congressional offices do for their local residents. From there, I knew I wanted to help good Members of Congress get elected."

Later, Jenny interned at the grassroots company, Fieldworks, where she realized that she wanted to work in campaigns. After receiving her M.A. degree in 2006, Jenny was hired as a field coordinator for Rod Smith's gubernatorial campaign, and then as political/field coordinator for Tim Mahoney's congressional race. She subsequently served as a Staff Assistant for Rep. Mahoney in DC, where she developed an interest in agriculture issues. From there, she moved on to a position with Travis Childers' congressional campaign in Mississippi.

After Childers won, Jenny served first as his senior Legislative Assistant and later as Legislative Director, where her interest in agriculture issues continued to develop. During Rep. Childers' re-election campaigns, Jenny served as deputy campaign manager and then campaign manager. When Childers lost his last re-election campaign, Jenny decided that she wanted to switch to policy. She was offered the opportunity to join the Farm Credit Council as a lobbyist, and has been there ever since. In her current position, she has the opportunity to work on both the political and policy issues important to Farm Credit and agriculture. Jenny thinks the beauty of politics is that "you can end up in so many different places. I have no idea where my career will take me or what my future is. But that's why I love politics."

The Election Landscape

Post-Election Workshop

On January 27, 2017, members of the political community, media, academia, and others gathered with students in the Political Campaigning program, as well as several Political Science undergrads, for our biennial election workshop at the Hilton University of Florida. As always, the day began with a lively retrospective on the last election (naturally emphasizing the presidential race between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton), and continued with a discussion of what we might look forward to in 2018 and beyond in light of the last campaign results, both nationally and here in Florida.

Academics included Daniel Smith, Roger Austin, Susan MacManus, and David Hill. These panelists were joined by political practitioners Barry Edwards, Becca Guerra, Jim Kane, Jim Kitchens, Steve Schale, Joel Searby, Elizabeth Sena, and Scott Simpson. Also present were Beth Reinhard of The Wall Street Journal and Adam Smith of the Tampa Bay Times.

In the morning session, the discussion centered on the 2016 election and the experiences and impressions of some of the speakers. Apart from a consideration of campaign strategy (good and bad) on both sides, there was much speculation about what Clinton might have done differently to produce a

more favorable outcome. Panelists also discussed the meaning of Trump's unstoppable rise during the Republican primary and the surprising early defeat of Jeb Bush. Beth Reinhard spoke of her unconventional experience covering then-candidate Trump on the campaign trail, and Joel Searby recounted his story of running Evan McMullin's Independent campaign for president.

After a break for lunch, participants and students re-convened to continue the discussion with a particular focus on the future of both parties. Even though Donald Trump won the election, some argued that this is a win for the Democrats in the long run because



it will be easier to motivate an angry base in 2018 and 2020. Others argued that the Democratic Party is the one that is divided this time around, not the Republican party.

A variety of topics were covered at the workshop, providing attendees with a multiplicity of views about how things actually work in the real world of politics. Given the mix of academics and practitioners, and of Republicans and Democrats, it's hardly surprising that not everyone was on the same page. Exchanges were always cordial, however, and hearing the different perspectives undoubtedly proved to be of great value to those who attended.



Scott Simpson, Managing Partner at Resonance Campaigns

The Direct Mail and Direct Messaging Business Scott Simpson

Scott's story in the political realm began not unlike others. He was fortunate to get an internship on a congressional campaign while still in college, moving on from there to manage a House of Delegates race in Maryland as soon as he graduated.

These experiences led to a plethora of opportunities. Scott would soon work for the Mayor of Washington, DC, and later for a political software firm, before deciding to apply to the Political Campaigning Program at UF.

After graduating in 2003, Scott worked for several years with a polling firm before leaving to start his own direct mail shop. Although he never imagined making such a move so quickly, Scott says that he would not change a thing about the path that led him to where he is now.

The business is always fast-paced, but the typical day varies depending on the time of year. Scott says that he usually spends his time "in the office going over mail pieces with account executives and designers, or else getting on a plane to meet with potential candidates or people who run political organizations."

Overall, Scott sees a lot of potential for growth. The firm's main objective now is to focus on what made it successful in the first place, which is "being able to talk to the diverse, 21st Century electorate and producing great mail."



Q & A with Joel Searby on Evan McMullin's 2016 Campaign

Joel Searby, who lives in nearby Alachua, was Campaign Manager for Evan McMullin for President in 2016. McMullin and Searby were disaffected Republicans who ran an independent campaign because they were dissatisfied with the Republican and Democratic nominees.

Q: What was your role in the campaign?

A: I was the campaign manager. In our compressed timeline that meant I was in charge of not only finding, interviewing, and hiring our entire staff but also traveling everywhere with Evan, leading our amazing team and handling just about whatever tasks came up.

Q: You used to identify as a Republican, correct? Did you ever expect that you would be involved in Independent politics?

A: I've never felt completely comfortable in Republican politics. Just like I think many people don't feel completely comfortable in either party. There's a vast group of people in our country who choose to side with a party over a few key issues they align on but end up feeling very uncomfortable with other issues. So while I never planned or aimed for working so heavily in independent politics, it does feel like the right fit for me not only personally but for this time in our nation's history.

Q: What happened that surprised you the most? What went as expected?

A: Honestly, what surprised me the most was just how successful we were. While the general voting public may not see or understand it, what we accomplished in three months was remarkable. We knew it was a near impossible task but Evan felt so strongly about someone standing up, and there were enough of us who felt likewise, that we just stepped out based on faith. We didn't know if we'd flame out in a week or maybe get some traction. I'm very proud of the traction we did get, and that's a testament to Evan as a candidate, to our great team, and to the appetite

out there last year for something different.

Q: How do you think you will approach politics differently as a result of being a part of the McMullin campaign? How do you see the future of the Republican party and the two-party system?

A: I am not out to blow up the parties. I think they remain important institutions for our country. But they are deeply broken and colluding to hold out competition. I am open to working with Republicans who care more about their country than their party, who are focused on getting things done for the greater good and are not blindly partisan. I'd be open to Democrats of the same belief. But I am not optimistic. I believe our system needs a fundamental creative disruption. Donald Trump is a destructive disruption to the system. Some good will come from that — I believe it. But we need a disruption that creates something entirely new.

Q: Will Evan run again? And if so, will you be a part of it?

A: Evan is weighing his options. He's very interested in serving the country in some capacity, but is a long way from making any decisions. We remain close and I have a deep admiration for his courage and leadership. If we get to work together again, that will be great.



Joel Searby

Advanced Campaign Strategy

Damien Filer

Damien Filer, Political Director for Progress Florida, is the longest-serving instructor in the Political Campaigning Program's Advanced Strategy class. This experienced Florida consultant says that he originally accepted the position simply because he loves teaching and is a big believer in paying it forward.

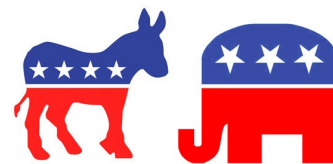
Having had great mentors and teachers through the course of his career, Damien believes that it is important to try and do for others what was done for him. Initially invited to UF as a guest lecturer on the constitutional amendment process, he later returned as a conference panelist and ultimately became an MA/PC adjunct instructor. Although he does a lot of training with clients, Damien says that "it's a luxury to be able to work with students over the course of several weeks where we have time for lectures, discussion, and hands-on exercises such as mock press conferences." The mock press conference is a staple of Damien's class, and

students always appreciate the value of this political communications exercise.

While Damien believed that teaching the class would be a one-time opportunity, he recently taught his section of the Advanced Strategy class for the fifth time. "It's an honor to be part of UF's Political Science department," he says. "I'll keep coming back as long as they keep asking."

When asked what his favorite part of teaching the class is, Damien insists that what makes it a great experience is the students and the feeling of being able to help future generations of political masterminds. "My favorite aspect of the class is seeing students take the things they've learned and put them into practice, whether during one of our press conference or editorial board exercises or, even better, working on a campaign in the real world."

Damien strives to instill in his students that you don't have to have a natural ability as a public speaker, for example, to learn how to be effective as a communicator either in front of a crowd or on camera. His most memorable piece of advice is that anyone can succeed in any aspect of politics — regardless of talent — if they are willing to work for it. Learning to be effective as a strategist, a spokesperson, or in any other aspect of political communications largely comes down to practice.



Where Are They Now?

Joe Pileggi (UF/PC 2005) is Political Director for the National Republican Congressional Committee in Washington, DC.

David Kochman (UF/PC 1995) has moved from campaign work to being the Director of Communications at Blue Cross/Blue Shield of North Carolina.

Catherine Moar (UF/PC 1993) is the owner of Catherine Moar Event Management Company, and has recently also become a Senior Consultant handling Government Relations & Crisis Communications with Navigator Ltd. in Canada.

Jamie Cobb-Voss (UF/PC 2006) following years of work in government and politics, has started a small business specializing in watersports and boat rentals in the US Virgin Islands.

Tim Nurvala (UF/PC 1991) is Corporate Vice President at CCS Fundraising, Inc., where he has been since 2008. He previously worked with non-profit organizations, governmental agencies, and international technology.



UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING PROGRAM



The University of Florida's Graduate Program in Political Campaigning (UF/PC) is designed to provide students with the skills, insights, and experiences that are critical for success in the ever-changing profession of politics and political consulting. Unlike other programs in professional politics, UF's M.A. in Political Campaigning combines the best of both academic study and practical experience.

By incorporating academic study in the fields of voting behavior, political participation, public opinion, political parties, and political communication, students are presented with a sound theoretical basis that can be used to better understand the "how" and "why" of political campaigns.

Political Campaigning Program (UF/PC)

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